



Spring 2016
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Encountering Egypt

Safwat Marzouk, AMBS Assistant Professor of Old Testament

For this trip we deliberately chose the name “Encountering Egypt” instead of “Touring Egypt.” It was my desire that rather than merely being tourists gazing at exotic places, we would encounter Egypt and in turn be encountered by Egypt (its people, history, and culture) and be transformed by the relationships we built. Although sightseeing was an essential part of the trip, our itinerary included opportunities to meet with Christian and Muslim communities.

The group met with Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki, president of the Protestant Communities in Egypt and general director of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services. He described ways the church is meeting spiritual, economic, and cultural needs of an ever-changing Egyptian society. During a meeting with a delegation at Al-Azhar University (one of the largest Islamic theological institutions), deputy Abbass Shoman elaborated on commitments in Islamic theology to peace and freedom of belief. At the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Dr. Atef Gendi, Dr. Tharwat

Waheeb and Dr. Hani Hanna introduced the group to the vision and mission of the seminary, which trains men and women to become church leaders in the Egyptian context. Another highlight of the community encounters took place when the group visited Saint Simeon



church in Al-Muqattam. A visit to the Saint Maqarios monastery taught us about the spirituality of the Coptic Orthodox Church, with its mystical and liturgical emphases. In Alexandria, Rev. Gendi Rizk, senior pastor of El-Saraya Presbyterian Church, described the simplicity and depth of the gospel, which transforms people within and outside the church.

Every day I shared with the group a text for meditation. We read from ancient Egyptian literature that relates to biblical texts (Hymn to the Aten,

Wisdom of Amenemope, etc.). We read meditations written by Christian Desert Fathers and Mothers (Anba Bakhomious, Saint Anthony, and Amma Syncletica, for example), and contemplative texts by Jewish theologians (Moses Maimonides and others) and Muslim theologians (including Umar Ibn Al Farid). Encountering Pharaonic, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sacred spaces and ancient texts deepened our appreciation for the richness of theological and spiritual strata undergirding Egypt's contemporary reality. Encountering Egypt in this way gave us an opportunity to reflect on our assumptions about Egypt and on our own spiritual journeys. Encountering Egypt led us to long and pray with renewed fervor—along with many Egyptians—for the fulfillment of the old prophetic pronouncement “Blessed be my people Egypt” (Isa. 19:25).

Photos Saint Simon Church in Muqattam, Cairo. Built in a cave, the Coptic Christian fellowship seats 20,000 people. **Center:** Dr. Safwat Marzouk and Dr. Kamal Abd El-Salam chat at Al-Azhar University. **Credits:** Safwat Marzouk and Bruce Baergen



Encountering Egypt ... and Safwat Marzouk Hank Landes

I signed up for this AMBS tour because I would learn about a people who have contributed so much to the human family over seven millennia, and my heart is full of gratitude. But while I was curious about the history, culture, and people of Egypt, I was especially eager to join because the tour was led by an Egyptian, Dr. Safwat Marzouk, assistant professor of Old Testament. Yes, we toured many of the classic antiquities—pyramids, temples, churches, synagogues, monasteries, and catacombs—with excellent interpretation by our local Egyptologist, who brought a thoughtful Coptic perspective. But the thing I valued most was encountering contemporary Egypt through the eyes and heart of Safwat. He arranged encounters with leaders of his alma mater, the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo; with the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services; and with Muslim leaders at the Al-Azhar University. I valued Safwat's knowledge and love of the Old Testament—and also his astute observation of the current political, economic, and religious challenges facing Egypt and God's people today. AMBS students are blessed to have Safwat as teacher and mentor.

— *Hank Landes is the founder of Delaware Valley Family Business Center, Souderton, Pa. and attends Salford Mennonite Church in Harleysville, Pa. He graduated in 1975 with a Master of Arts in Religion degree from AMBS.* ●

Photos Top: The group visited Saint Maqarios monastery where Father Marqorios (center) oriented them to monastic life. Right: Jim and Sally Longley enjoy a felucca ride on the Nile. **Credits:** Bruce Baergen and Safwat Marzouk

Egypt's Deep History Jim Longley

Egyptian humor is delightful! We experienced it daily in Henry, our Egyptologist guide, whose participation in archeological discoveries and faith as a Coptic Orthodox deacon enriched our encounter with Egypt. To stand before the Great Pyramid of Giza is to experience awe at its massive, unshakable eminence. Political-religious aspirations flowing from Tahrir Square spoke of a people striving to reclaim their land after millennia of occupation.

The deep history of Egypt reverberates into the present. The Christian experience in this land shouts to me of both context and paradigm: the triple-faith-founder Abraham sojournd here, as did his exdescendent Jesus the refugee; the ancient Pharaonic hieroglyphic art speaks of rich cultural and religious insight; the



Moses story of liberation presages the gospel brought here with St. Mark; and Jesus followers' faithful survival and honest engagement with their Muslim neighbors is testament to perseverance with a humility sadly rare in the West. Sally and I were privileged to be part of the AMBS community, which enabled these explorations. — *Jim Longley, AMBS student, is Deputy Secretary in the Department of Family and Community Services and member of the Anabaptist Network in Sydney, Australia.*

AMBS Window Spring 2016 Volume 26 Issue 2

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About the Egypt Learning Tour

From January 12 to 26, 2016, 35 participants joined AMBS president Sara Wenger Shenk and assistant professor of Old Testament Safwat Marzouk on a tour of historic, religious, and contemporary sites in Egypt. Coordinated by Menno Travel, the trip provided opportunities to explore questions around Egypt and the Bible, Christianity in Egypt, and interreligious relationships. The group experienced the hospitality and courage of the Egyptian people, who are still dreaming of social justice, a livelihood, and freedom. Together, participants came to understand some of the social, cultural, and theological depth of the Egyptian communities they encountered. They were also challenged to think about what it means to be global citizens of a world in which cultures and theologies continue to challenge and engage each other. ●

Photo At the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, near Luxor. Front: Gerald Shenk, Hank Landes, Sally Longley, Rachel Johns, Ruth Guengerich, Phyllis Stutzman, Caley Ortman and Lisa Schrag. Second: Kirsten Schroeder, Naomi Wenger, Sara Erb, Julia Schmidt, Dianne Schmidt, Noreen Kanagy, Rhoda Schrag, Susan Dengler, Carol Lehman, Kristy Shellenberg and Sara Wenger Shenk. Third: Ron Guengerich, Lorraine Mueller, Renee Reimer, John Kampen, Hilda Shirk, Wes Farmer, Lee Dengler, Christine Kampen, Carley Brubaker, Debbie Baergen and Steven Dinnocenti. Back: Jim Longley, Loren Johns, Bruce Baergen, Phil Wenger, James Brubaker and Wilma Bailey. **Credit:** Safwat Marzouk



Egypt Sound-by-Sound Naomi Wenger

In the early morning haze of Cairo, tuk-tuk drivers toot their horns and ring their bells to attract the attention of anyone who may be induced to ride in these motorcycle taxis. While all drivers in Egypt sound their horns as they drive, the dinging of the bells added to the cacophony of the streets around our hotel on the road to Giza and the Great Pyramids. The first addition to the honking hum of the city was the 5:00 a.m. call to prayer that echoed from mosque to mosque between neighborhoods. Then, if I listened closely, I could hear a donkey braying in defiance of an order to pull an overloaded produce cart.

Later in the day, the grumbling belch of a camel as his young driver prodded him to his feet under me was a strong reminder of a way of life now displaced to the margins as tourist entertainment.

As we continued our journey, the honking of horns gave way first to the clunkity-clunk of a train and then to the ubiquitous thrum of a diesel engine underfoot on a Nile River cruise boat. On the sun deck, the quiet of the countryside was more apparent as we glided past villages, farms, and desert stretches of sand and rock.

As we sailed on a felucca around Elephantine Island in Aswan, young boys paddling boards serenaded us with their “Englees” songs—which included an old cowboy song (“Whoopie-ti-yi-yay!”), “Frère Jacques” (French), and “Macarena” (Spanish). The order of songs never varied though they were sung by different boys on different days.

In ancient temples and in public places, sparrows competed noisily for song space and nest room, while wild cats either fought or asked politely for handouts and wild dogs silently watched for a morsel to fall from a café table.

Everywhere the sounds of Egypt crowded my ears. This is a country pressed not to a coastline but to the heart of the land where the Nile runs silently and persistently past temples and tombs thousands of years old. Crowded into the small area on each side of the river wherever water can push back the great deserts to the east and west, more than 82 million Egyptians clamor for the world’s ear.

I will remember the sounds of Egypt even as the sunset call to prayer from 108,000 mosques reminds me to pray for its people. — Naomi Wenger is completing a Master of Arts: Theological Studies with a concentration in Biblical Studies. She is also co-director of The Hermitage, a retreat community in Three Rivers, Michigan. ●

Photos Left: Visiting a Nubian house in Aswan (upper Egypt). Right: Taking a felucca ride on the Nile.

Credits: Sara Wenger Shenk and Safwat Marzouk



AMBS PANORAMA



Tour Europe 2017:

Reformations Old and New

Explore European faith and art—past and present—in London, Paris, and

Berlin. Enjoy meaningful discussions and times of reflection and worship, as well as lighthearted fun. Sara Wenger Shenk and tour storyteller Allan Rudy-Froese, assistant professor of Christian proclamation at AMBS, will help you interpret the sights from an Anabaptist perspective. For information, visit ambs.edu/ReformationsOldNew

New blog: Mary's Prayers

On Mary's Prayers, Mary H. Schertz, professor of New Testament, offers a brief reflection on a Scripture text and an original prayer. Each post reflects her sustained engagement with the biblical text and her desire to invite others into that deep love for the text and the gracious God to whom it bears witness. Follow along at ambs.edu/marysprayers

Bible Short Course

A **six-week non-credit online course** for people seeking to deepen their faith and spiritual understanding by engaging the Biblical text.

Creating a Scene in Corinth: Conflict in 1 Corinthians

April 13-May 24, 2016

Presenter: Reta Halteman Finger

Spring Webinar

Greg Boyd on Anabaptism: Engaging Mauricio Chenlo on Mennonite Church Planting — Conversation 4

Thursday, April 14, 2016

2:00–3:30p.m. EDT

Presenters: Greg Boyd and

Mauricio Chenlo

Moderator: David B. Miller, AMBS

Listen to this!

Keep up with AMBS events by listening to audio recordings at ambs.edu/news-events/iTunesU. Recent offerings include plenary presentations from Pastors Week 2016, and lectures from Peace Studies Guest J. Daryl Byler and Martin Luther King Day weekend presenter Ewuare Osayande.

Anabaptist Short Courses

These **six-week non-credit online courses** provide new Anabaptists and everyone seeking to deepen their ministry with an opportunity to engage Anabaptist history, thought, and witness.

Participation, Power and Process: Why Polity Matters

April 13-May 24, 2016

Presenters: Janeen Bertsche Johnson and Willard Metzger

Other Anabaptist Short Courses that are offered on a rotating basis include:

- Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology
- Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture: What's Different and Why?
- Engaging John Howard Yoder's Theology Today
- Historia y Teologia de Anabautism
- Understanding and Managing Congregational Conflict
- Exploring Peace and Justice in the Bible

For details, visit ambs.edu/churchleadershipcenter/anabaptist-short-courses ●

PRESIDENT'S WINDOW SARA WENGER SHENK



Encountering Egypt: Moving out of our comfort zones

The diverse group of 37 from Australia, Canada, the US, and Egypt, including five lifelong scholars of the Bible, came together remarkably well.

I knew we would be all right when, after an uncomfortable all night train ride from Cairo to Luxor, people emerged from their cold, cramped cabins laughing and then lit up the morning with song—

an AMBS community of learning on the move.

- There were illuminating encounters:
- driving through the “garbage village” of Cairo only to emerge into an expansive canyon of cave churches, cliff “gospel” carvings and stories of Coptic priests whose leadership has been transformative for that marginalized, largely Christian community; or
 - learning from Muslim scholars who spoke of their commitment to protect Christian churches in Egypt and to collaborate with Christian leaders, building on common values for religious freedom and peaceful coexistence; or
 - learning from church leaders (Protestant and Orthodox) who described hardships since the Arab Spring and yet the renewal of the church, including some 91 new Coptic Evangelical fellowships and 25 new churches; or
 - learning from Christian social service organizational leaders about their

human rights-based approach to social transformation, including creating social businesses that both care for people and make a profit.

There were few tourists compared to the crowds that were normal at Egyptian antiquities sites before the 2011 revolution. Often we observed the desperation of those without work and the rubbish-strewn river and weary land. And yet, there were also lush banana and palm groves, colorful birds, and the sparkling humor of countless persons whom God has blessed with resilience, gracious hospitality, and enterprising creativity. As an AMBS learning community on the move, we are indebted to our amazing guides and gracious hosts who blessed us by taking us to uncomfortable places, sparking breakthrough moments of illumination. Thanks be! — *Sara Wenger Shenk, AMBS president* ●

Photos Sara Wenger Shenk and Gerald Shenk at The Pyramids of Giza in Cairo, Egypt. **Credit:** Phil Wenger